

# Kunapipi

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Volume 13 | Issue 3

Article 7

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1991

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## Recommended Citation

Poignant, Axel, Axel Poignant, *Kunapipi*, 13(3), 1991.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol13/iss3/7>

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## Axel Poignant

### Abstract

Axel Poignant was Anglo-Swedish. He arrived in Australia as a British 'boy' immigrant in 1926. His formative years as a photographer were spent in Perth from 1931 to 1942. He photographed Aboriginal people on Canning Stock route in 1942 and first visited the Northern Territory in 1945-46, as a cameraman on The Overlanders. In 1952 he camped on the west bank of the Liverpool River and within a short time some 60 to 70 Aboriginal people were encamped around him. As well as taking photos, Axel Poignant also kept a diary. Few of his photographs were published before the late 1960s when they were used in support of Aboriginal Land Rights Claims, but since then he has gained wide acclaim and had a series of major exhibitions.

## Axel Poignant

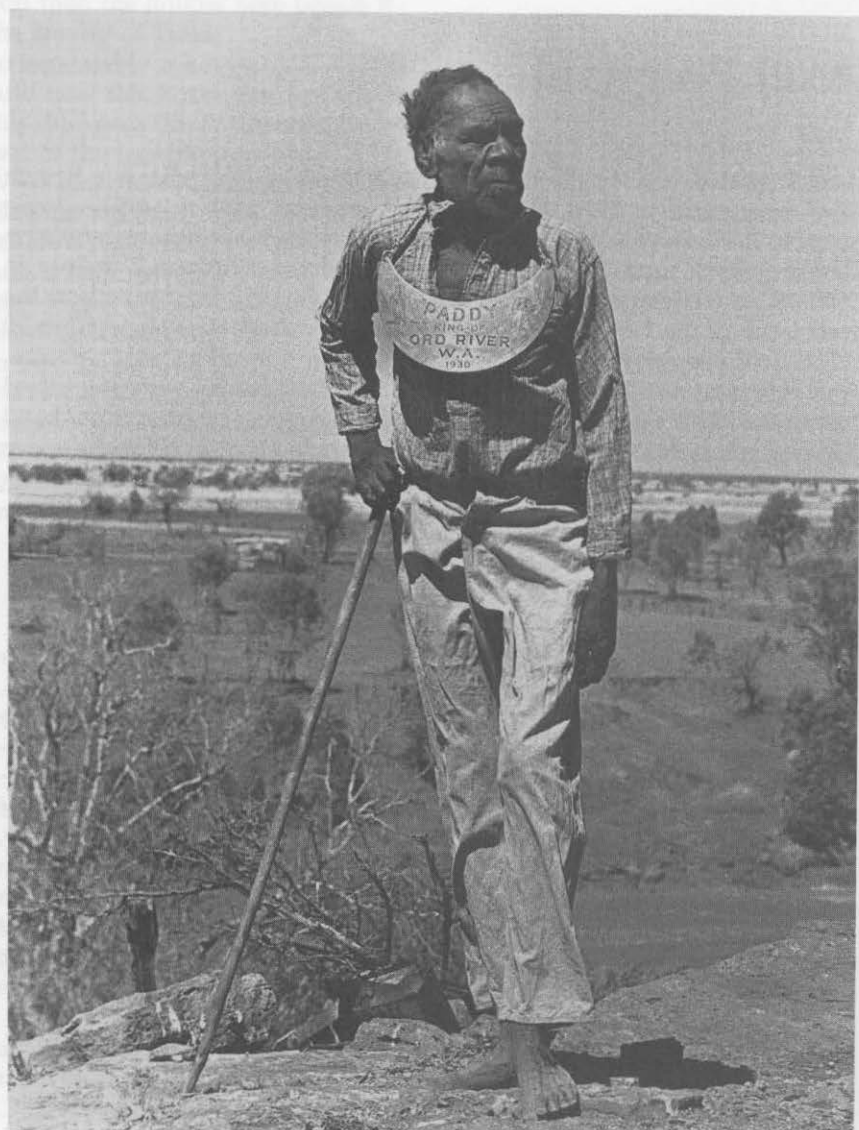
Axel Poignant was Anglo-Swedish. He arrived in Australia as a British 'boy' immigrant in 1926. His formative years as a photographer were spent in Perth from 1931 to 1942. He photographed Aboriginal people on Canning Stock route in 1942 and first visited the Northern Territory in 1945-46, as a cameraman on *The Overlanders*. In 1952 he camped on the west bank of the Liverpool River and within a short time some 60 to 70 Aboriginal people were encamped around him. As well as taking photos, Axel Poignant also kept a diary. Few of his photographs were published before the late 1960s when they were used in support of Aboriginal Land Rights Claims, but since then he has gained wide acclaim and had a series of major exhibitions.

### Note on 'Paddy, King of Ord River':

The man in the photo is wearing a plaque round his neck. From the time of the first white settlement in Australia plaques have had a long tradition. One of the first ones was given by Governor Macquarie to an Aborigine from the Broken Bay tribe who was a man of great courage and intelligence and who had accompanied Matthew Flinders when he circumnavigated Australia in the *Investigator*. The inscription read: 'Bungaree, King of the Blacks.' The wearer's name in Axel Poignant's photo was not Paddy, the plaque was handed down from elder to elder. (The elder was the man who traditionally had authority over the Aboriginal work force. Though he was too old to work, the station owners supplied him with two sets of clothes a year and food rations. This was so that he would stay on the station and so ensure that the rest of the Aboriginal work force would also stay.)

The tradition has not died. When David Malangi's ownership of the design on the Australian dollar was finally acknowledged, he received a small medal on a chain inscribed 'Presented to David Malangi by Dr H.C. Coombs, Reserve Bank of Australia, August 1967'. He also received \$500, a dinghy and a large army tent.

Axel Poignant wrote in his diary: 'I had stopped by the station overnight and saw "Paddy" by the kitchen door. In the morning we walked a short distance to a spot where I could see his country behind him, and I photographed him there, in order to convey my feelings about his exploitation.'

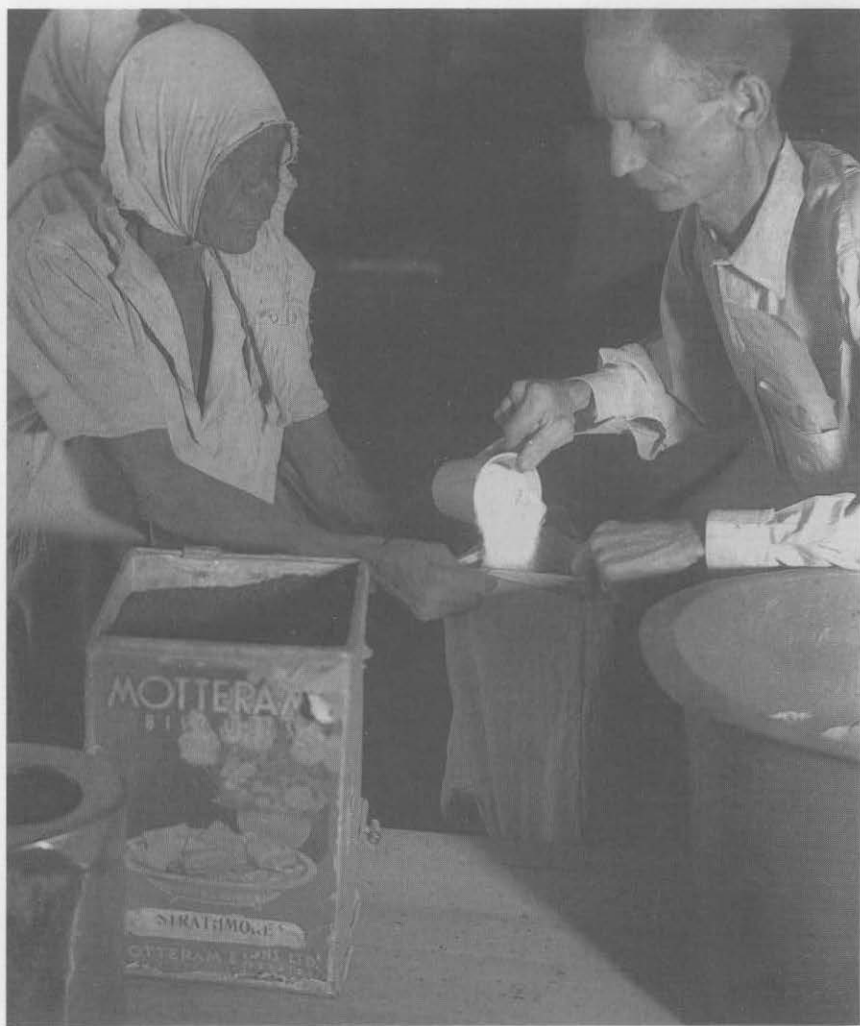


Paddy, 'King of Ord River', Western Australia, 1946.

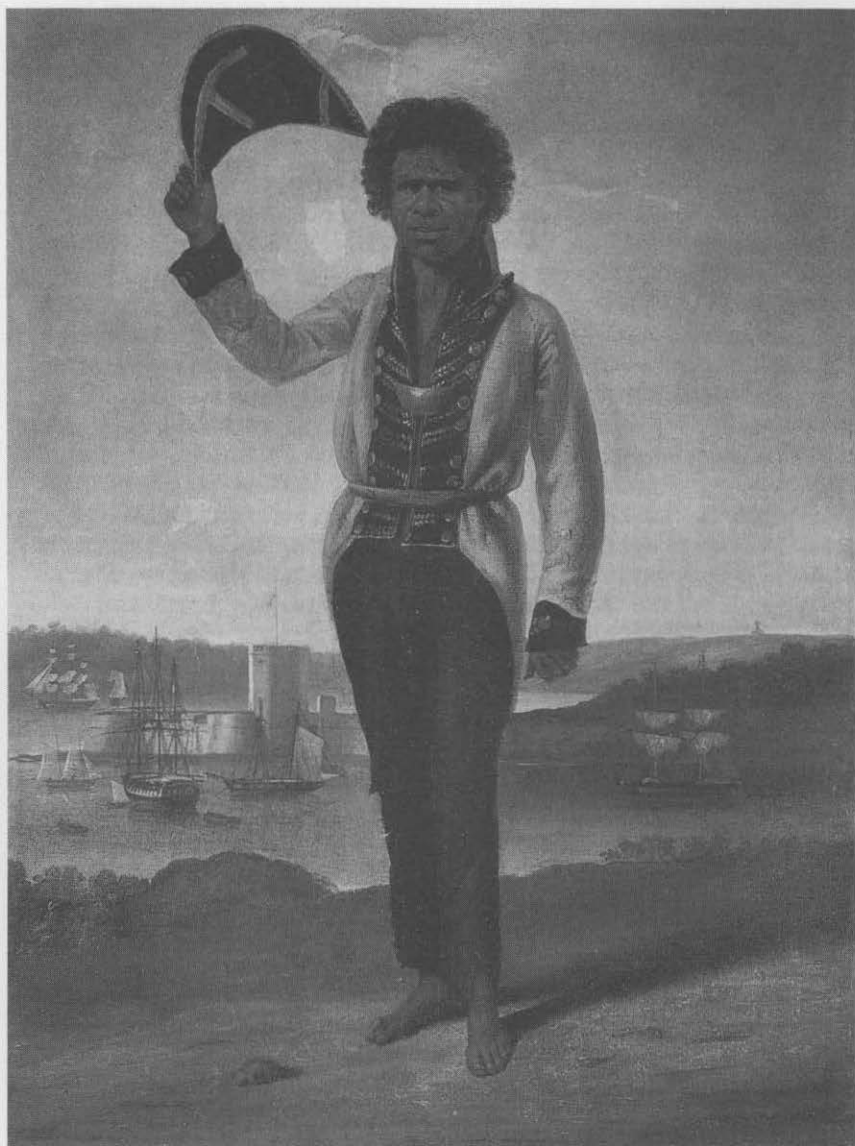


Elder with hand-out of offal, Mt. Doreen, Northern Territory, 1946.

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The Ration, Wave Hill, Northern Territory, c. 1946-47.



Bungaree, A Native of New South Wales: Augustus Earle (1793-1838).  
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